

# **Moral Education in the Emerging Chinese Society**

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## **Abstract**

Since the “reform and opening-up” policy, Chinese society has been greatly affected by rapid industrialization, the installation of a market economy, and exposure to Western ideas and practices. These changes are having an impact on the current moral education program in varying degrees of intensity. The purpose of this thesis is to develop a framework for moral education in a meaningful and practical manner, and to provide an antidote to the current confusion regarding values in China. This thesis examines moral theories from both Eastern and Western perspectives. It focuses on Confucianism and Storytelling primarily. Confucianism, specially the Five Constant Virtues, still has practical value for a modern Chinese society. The storytelling approach, it is argued, creates the opportunity for critical thinking and self-reflection, and embraces both traditional and modern concerns. I conclude that a new moral education curriculum integrating Confucianism and storytelling is particularly promising in this regard.

## **Résumé**

Depuis la politique « de réforme et d'ouverture, » la Chine vit une évolution très rapide, tant au niveau économique qu'au niveau des idées et des valeurs. Les changements en cours sont largement influencés par l'Occident. Ces changements ont un impact important sur le développement des programmes en éducation morale. Le but de cette thèse est d'articuler un cadre significatif et pratique pour l'éducation morale en Chine. Plus précisément, elle cherche à cerner une approche qui tient compte des valeurs chinoises traditionnelles, plus particulièrement le confucianisme, tout en incorporant une vision pédagogique ouverte et moderne. L'approche narrative est proposée comme prometteuse en ce sens.

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# **Introduction**

## **Rhetorical Situation:**

Since the economic reform in China, Chinese society has changed in every aspect. The people's standard of living has improved, and a growing number of people are opening up to modern ideas, such as freedom and pluralism. On the other hand, many people find great difficulty in identifying the values to assist them in making responsible choices to guide their lives. For example, the immature market economy brings about moral confusion, suspicion, and money worship. Globalization, mass media and the Internet seduce young people away from their culture. Conflicting values, such as individualism versus collectivism, are making people uncertain about their beliefs.

This topic for my thesis really came to my mind when a former university classmate ended his life in his senior year. He hanged himself in the hallway of the dormitory. He came from an economically backward area, and he was the only son in the family. As the first member of his family to get into university in Shanghai, he was the pride of his whole family. As with most students from less developed areas, he was attracted by the prosperity of Shanghai, but also felt contempt from "rich" students. He spent a great deal of time on his part-time job, which diminished his academic performance. Unfortunately, he failed several times on the CET-4 exam,

and still could not pass it in his senior year. According to university regulations, he could not get his degree. Without a degree, he could not get a contract with a potential employer; and he felt humiliated to face his parents. Suicide became his only escape. Dramatic measures, such as suicide, are not unusual for the younger generation, but I never expected it to happen to one of my acquaintances.

When we hear about these kinds of tragedies, we usually think “it is too far away from my life”. But the truth is it is never that far. I want to share some recent tragic events, which are very well-known in China:

Ma Jiajue, a senior university student killed four of his roommates over three days, and hid their bodies in a dormitory closet, then ran away. Under arrest, he confessed his crime. He told the police he killed his roommates because they looked down on him because of his impoverished family background; and he finally made this decision because he could not stand their making fun of him during a poker game. His classmates said Ma Jiajue was very shy and sensitive. After he bought a computer, he became addicted to the Internet and became a fan of violent movies (Zhi & Huang 2004, March 17).

Yang Lijuan had been crazy about Hong Kong pop star Andy Lau for twelve years. Unwilling to see their daughter's heart broken, her father even planned to sell his kidney to finance her. In March, 2007, her family sold everything they had to go to Hong Kong in order to meet Andy Lau. Yang Lijuan finally met her idol, and was invited to a fans' party. However, she was not satisfied and asked for a longer meeting



with Andy, but did not get the chance. After several days in Hong Kong, the family ran out of money, but they still could not meet Andy. The father decided to commit suicide to draw Andy's attention. He left his will in a long letter, jumped into the sea, and drowned (Tao 2007, March 29).

Most of us would probably say the people in these examples are deranged, that their behavior is marginal. I disagree. I see Ma Jiajue's case as the effect of the money worship in the emerging Chinese society. Students from rich families are always popular on campus; they spend a great deal of money and get much attention. But Ma Jiajue, my classmate, and most students from impoverished families, often feel isolated from other students. They have more limited social life than other students because of their economic situations. For example, they can not go to parties, shop, dine out, or most activities requiring frivolous expenses.

There is also a concern regarding the negative effect of the Internet. According to media reports, being addicted to violent movies is one of the major causes of Ma Jiajue's actions. Zhao Ying, a psychology counselor, points out that images of violence in movies and on the Internet should also be at least partially blamed for rising violent crimes among young people (Zhi & Huang 2004, March 17).

In Yang Lijuan's case, some may question her father's inappropriate parenting strategy. Her case may be the precedent of a self-centered, spoiled and demanding generation. She is the only child in the family and also the center of the whole family. She does not know how to appreciate others' support or how to care for others. Since

the one-child policy, the great majority of city families have only one child. The only child becomes the center of the whole family. They are not just spoiled by their parents, but also by their four grandparents. They display many negative personal characteristics, such as self-centeredness and are less cooperative, sociable, and responsible. This is now a very noticeable phenomenon.

In both cases we are talking about young adults, Ma was around 23 in 2004, and Yang was 28 in 2007. We can imagine that when young adults experience such disarray that confusion must be particularly prevalent among mentally immature teenagers.

Some serious questions arise from these two cases: what we can offer to help the young generation deal with changes in societal values? How can education support and nurture healthy personal development, particularly moral development?

China is one of the few countries that require students to study moral education from their first day in elementary school through university and graduate school. Chinese students are supposed to learn well because they spend such a long time studying “morals”. But as a teacher and also a member of a new generation of young people in China, I am seeing and experiencing how students are uninterested in moral education, how little those students are really learning from the curriculum of moral education, how they disengage from the moral education curriculum and are simultaneously isolated from the values they are supposed to espouse and practice.

## **Methodology and Purpose:**

The conceptual framework of this study is shaped by philosophical methodology. It is an analysis of moral theories currently being used and used in the past. By analyzing these moral education theories, I hope to create a structure for an effective program of compulsory moral education. To this end, I employ the philosophical method of critique to argue for the use of narrative as particularly promising for the current context.

The intention of my study is to redesign the moral education curriculum in a meaningful and practical manner to enrich students' moral lives, and to provide an antidote to the current confusion regarding values in China. Through such a program of study, I hope to encourage a culturally appropriate framework for moral education.

My studies seek to make a contribution to the disciplines of moral philosophy and moral education in practice. Since not much research about moral education in mainland China has been done by Western researchers, the study can provide an understanding of the recent changes in China. Moreover, although there are many Chinese researchers studying Western theories in the field of moral education, they seldom focus on the practical application of these theories. Here, the storytelling approach is particularly salient for developing practical teaching strategies.

In this thesis, I hope to accomplish the following: (1) Identify specific value conflicts and moral dilemmas students face in the market reform; (2) Offer students an approach that can help students address crucial moral dilemmas; (3) Give teachers

suggestions regarding storytelling as a teaching strategy to draw on student's interests and get them more actively involved in the curriculum.

## **Overview:**

My study focuses on compulsory moral education (Grade 1-9) in China because moral education at this stage is concerned with different levels of moral development, and because it is not politically-oriented. The main issue I address is the need to bring an effective program of compulsory moral education to classrooms in the face of social changes shaped by market reform.

In chapter one, I present an overview of current Chinese moral education. I examine what social factors influence and guide students in making of their moral choices. My purpose here is to bridge the gap between the current moral education curriculum and newly emerging moral dilemmas.

Chapter two focuses on Confucian thinking about moral education. I present an overview of Confucianism based on its main tenets. I especially focus on its main components—the Five Constant Virtues and the idea of practicing virtues in daily life. These virtues have continuing practical value for moral education in China.

Finally, in chapter three, I focus on Western approaches. I present Kohlberg's theory of moral development and the Values Clarification approach to moral education and examine their applications in China. I then focus on storytelling as a rich alternative to both Kohlberg's theory and Values Clarification. I examine the extent to

which the approach is applicable to the Chinese reality, how to integrate storytelling with Chinese virtues and values. The storytelling approach, I believe, can address contemporary challenges while honoring traditional Chinese values and virtues.

# **Chapter One: Moral Education in China**

## **Introduction:**

In 1978, Deng Xiaoping, the leader of the Communist Party of China (CPC), raised the new issue of opening China to the outside world in the eleventh CPC Central Committee Meeting (Xu, 2005). During the meeting, the Party adopted a new policy, “the reform and opening-up policy”. This new policy made the strategic decision to shift from a planned economy model to a market economy model, to focus on modernization and to revitalize the domestic economy and open it up to the outside world (Chinatyfo, 2005). In a short period of time, China faces many important opportunities and experiences unprecedented changes in the society. China is no longer closing its communication with other countries; instead, China tries to have active economic and cultural exchanges with other nations of the world. Thus, the planned economy model has gradually changed into the market economy model.

Meanwhile, rapid economic development has brought about better living standards, and has changed people’s way of thinking and behaving. These changes have brought about different perspectives and practices in moral education.

This chapter presents the content of moral education curriculum, the influences of the social changes on programs, and examines the social problems arising from the changes. I divide the chapter into three sections. In the first section, I focus on the

background, aims and teaching approaches of moral education in China. In the second section, I address two major social changes and the challenges arising from these changes. The last section is a review of the research on the emerging issues.

## **Moral Education in China**

Moral education in China is taught throughout the educational system—from elementary to post-secondary education. Moral education includes specific subjects, such as ideology and morality, politics, law, moral character and society. Because of its broad content, moral education has other names in China, such as “ideological education” or “political education” or “ideo-political moral education”. These terms reflect the fact that Chinese moral education is very closely associated with politics. According to Lee and Ho (2005), these terms reveal how moral education is regarded essentially as a means of political socialization, which aims to transmit ideological and political values to students, and to the populace at large.

Because of its politically oriented nature, Chinese moral education is different from moral education in Western countries. In the following section, I will focus on the background, aims, curriculum and teaching approaches.

## **Background of Chinese Moral Education**

Moral education in China is often seen as a medium for strengthening the socialist nature of school and society. It changes with the changing policy and ideological

orientations. According to Lee and Ho (2005), there are three major directional changes in moral education policy since the founding of the People's Republic of China: "(1) politically oriented moral education (1949-1978); (2) moral education gradually independent from politics (1978-1993); (3) depoliticized moral education (since 1993)" (p.419).

In 1978, at the National Conference of Education, Deng Xiaoping declared that "education is to contribute towards economic development rather than to the achievement of political purity alone" (Kam, 1984, p.33). This new emphasis resulted in attempts to signify the return to an emphasis on teaching the practice of virtue in the school system. In 1993 and 1994, the government issued two significant documents that changed the direction of moral education: *Opinions on Strengthening and Improving the Party and Ideo-political Works in Higher Institutes in New Circumstances* (Lee & Ho, 2005, p.420); and *Opinions on Further Strengthening and Improving Moral Education Work in Schools* (PRCMOE, 1994). The documents launched the idea of defining moral education as the combination of Marxist theory lessons and ideo-political education lessons, in short, "two lessons" education. The term ideo-political education in this context refers to "ideological cultivation and life philosophies" (Lee & Ho, 2005, p. 420). In this sense, those two documents signified a new time for moral education; moral education was officially dissociated from political education. In 1998, there was another important document issued by the government entitled *Notice of Opinions in Relation to Two Lessons: Curriculum*



*Regulations and Implementation* (PRCMOE, 1998). This document further endorsed the “two lessons” policy, and more importantly, moral education was given its new content. Virtues and life philosophies that are not related to politics were included in the moral education curriculum. Lee & Ho (2005) state that the new changes show that moral education starts to be “regarded as important in its own right”, and personal moral qualities are “regarded as important for people to face challenges generated in the process of modernization” (p.421).

The new policy leads to the development of a new emphasis within moral education curriculum content. Different subjects are divided into different topics according to students’ age-related mental development. In elementary schools, the two topics are moral character and life (for student in Grade 1-2) and moral character and society (for students in Grade 3-6). In junior high schools (students in Grade 7-9), the focus is on ideology and morality, and the aim is to try to deal comprehensively with issues in morality, law, national conditions and mental health. In senior high schools (students in Grade 10-12), the focus is on ideology and politics (Zhu & Liu, 2004). At the university level, moral education focuses on political science. The theoretical guidelines are mainly Marxism-Leninism, Maoist Thought and Deng Xiaoping's Theory.

The curriculum content for different grades is presented in the following table:

Elementary School Grade 1-6		Junior High School Grade 7-9 (Ideology & Morality)		Senior High School Grade 10-12 (Ideology & Politics)		Post-secondary (required courses)
Grade 1-2	Moral Character & Life	Grade7	The Citizen	Grade 10	Marxism Economics	Maoist Thought
						Deng Xiaoping's Theory
Grade 3-6	Moral Character & Society	Grade 8	A Brief History of Social Development	Grade 11	Marxism Philosophy	Contemporary World Politics and Economy
						Foundation of Law
		Grade 9	General Knowledge about Socialist Construction in China	Grade 12	Marxism Politics	Marxist Philosophy
						Marxist Economic Principles

As we can see from the table, a political orientation is added at higher levels of education. In senior high school, moral education turns out to be Marxist education, and in the post-secondary education, moral education is closely associated with the socialist and communist theories. In this sense, my study will focus on moral education at the compulsory education level (elementary schools and junior high schools, from Grade 1-9) because moral education at this level is more concerned with the basic nature of moral education. It includes such as the topic of virtues, morality, moral reasoning, and moral knowledge.

## **Aims of Compulsory Moral Education**

The basic task of moral education in compulsory education is to foster citizens who ardently love the motherland and possess a social ethic, develop civilized behavior, and observe the laws. In addition to the basic task, moral education also tries to guide the students to build a “correct” outlook on the world, life and values. It also aims to improve their socialistic consciousness so as to lay a solid foundation for an emerging generation with loyalty, moral integrity, knowledge and culture, and to observe rules (Chinagate, 2002).

According to *Curriculum Guidelines for Compulsory Moral Education* (PRCMOE, 2003), the aims of moral education are divided into three categories—(1) Emotions, Attitudes and Values; (2) Ability; and (3) Knowledge. Each category has its detailed descriptions, as follows:

### **(1) Emotions, Attitudes and Values**

This category aims to cultivate in students a positive attitude towards life, a stable character and healthy habits (e.g., self-respect and self-confidence, a strong-will, honesty, responsibility, concern for nature); to help students develop an interest in building a loving and caring relationships with others, the family and the community; to cultivate in students the spirit of service to society (e.g., thoughtfulness, filial piety, love of peace, love of the community and the motherland, respect for parents and teachers); to help students know how to respect the rights of others and how to cooperate with others (e.g., respect for the law, respect for others’ rights).

## **(2) Ability**

This category seeks to cultivate in students an interest in the world around them and the ability to think for themselves and make decisions (Chong, 1998). This includes the ability to appreciate nature and protect the environment, the ability to communicate, the ability to understand the meaning of the rules, the law and the ability to know right from wrong.

## **(3) Knowledge**

Here the emphasis is on enabling students to obtain moral knowledge of the self, family, others, the community, and the world; to develop students' knowledge of the law and the motherland and also an understanding of the larger world context.

## **Moral Education Curriculum**

Moral education occupies an important place in school education. The Ministry of Education of China issued the latest curriculum guideline in 2003 to update the curriculum, and to meet the needs of Chinese society in the process of its modernization and opening up to the world.

This new guideline divided the curriculum into three parts. The curriculum contents begin with developing students' mental and moral growth, and imparting knowledge of the law and the motherland. Since no one can be separate from others and society, it is considered essential that they know how to communicate with others and understand the significance of their contributions to others. In a larger sense, it is

important for students to cultivate a harmonious relationship with society since community and society are the places where they learn moral values such as how to respect the regulations and rules. The following is an outline taken out from the *Curriculum Guidelines for Compulsory Moral Education* (PRCMOE, 2003, p. 4-12):

(1) Self:     --know yourself

                  --self respect

                  --rules and behavior

(2) Relationship with Others:

                  --communication

                  --communication about morality (e.g. filial piety, sharing, caring)

                  --rights and responsibility

(3) Relationships with the Community, the Motherland and the Society

                  --sense of belonging and participation

                  --responsibilities in society

                  --rules, regulations, and the law

                  --patriotism

The framework is summarized in the following table:

	Psychology	Moral	Law	Situation of the Motherland
Self	Know self	Self-respect	Rules and behaviors	Identify with the culture of motherland
Relationship with Others	Communicate	Communication about morality	Rights and responsibilities	Common ideology
Relationships with the Community, the Motherland and the Society	Participate in the society	Responsibilities in the society	Rules, regulations and the law	Patriotism

According to Weimin Huang (2003), this is the first time that psychological health is brought into the curriculum, especially in the category of *self*. Some new concepts are introduced in this document, such as the “generation gap”, “adolescent delinquency” “diagnosable episodes of depression”, to help students understand physical and mental changes in adolescence and to cultivate in students a “stable” character. Sharing and cooperation are emphasized in the document in order to cultivate in students a positive, healthy attitude towards self-improvement and study. Making personal moral judgments, and making one’s own decisions, are also emphasized. It is considered important to develop students’ logical thinking and analysis abilities. I can conclude that this curriculum guideline places emphasis on the development of the psychological health of individual students and the ability to make moral judgments.

## Teaching Approaches

Since Chinese moral education has a long history of associating with politics, teachers normally major in political education or political science, whereas, some study philosophy.

According to Guanghui Tu (1985) and Mingxuan Shi (1986), the recommended approach is to:

- Have students understand by instruction and persuasion
- Make students empathic by the teacher's care for them
- Take practical exercises in forming good habits, doing good deeds, keeping rules
- Set students good examples
- Direct students in self-education
- Evaluate students' behaviors (cited in Li, 1990, p.167)

These elements appear worthwhile, but few teachers would be aware of them in their teaching. Here is a part of a teaching lesson reflecting how teachers typically teach. It is a class that aims to teach manners in elementary school (Fanwen, 2006):

(By showing two dialogues—one uses “please”, one does not)

Teacher: “Which one do you think is better?”

Students: “The first one.”

Teacher: “Why?”

Students: “Because they used ‘please’.”

Teacher: “Right, ‘please’ is a way to be polite and show respect.” “Who can give me an example of how to use ‘please’?”

Students :( gave examples...)

(Followed with exercises—filling the blanks: where to use ‘please’.)

This teaching lesson aims to teach students manners, by emphasizing such words as “please”, “thank you”, and “sorry”. The aim of this lesson is to teach students to grow-up with manners and good behaviors. However, this teaching sample is more like a sample from a language class. The lesson seeks to inculcate. Not enough emphasis, however, is placed on the theme of morality, personal reflection and character building.

Normally, this classroom method places the teacher as an authority lecturing to docile and passive students (Meyer, 1988). Typically, teachers will read the texts to the students, and the students try to remember them for the examinations. In compulsory education (Grade 1-9), the examinations in moral classes are not as important as in senior high school and in universities<sup>1</sup>. But teachers believe that only when students can remember all the moral knowledge and principles will they behave according to what they learned. Moreover, despite the claim to reject the doctrinaire style, teachers are not ready to give up their authority. According to Meyer (1988), he did not see true discussions in the “discussion-holding” classroom. He writes, “the best speakers seemed to be students expressing ideas either previously found in the textbook or already hinted at by the teacher” (p.33).

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<sup>1</sup> In senior high school, moral education courses constitute a big part of the University Entrance Examination. In post-secondary education level, all the moral education courses are required courses. They are one of the major subjects in the Graduate School Entrance Examination.



## **Moral Education: Social Changes and Challenges**

Since the reform and opening-up policy, there have been major changes in Chinese society during the process of the modernization. These changes have affected people's conception of values; thus, have deeply influenced education in general and moral education in particular. In this section, I will describe two major social changes that are particularly relevant to the challenges of moral education.

### **The Market Economy System**

The Chinese economy has developed very quickly since 1978 when China has changed its planned economy model to a market economy model (Xu, 2005). According to the latest annual report by the National Bureau of Statistics of China in 2006, the Chinese economy keeps developing. The annual economic growth rate is above 10% in 2006. This is higher than any previous year. The market economy in China has not only promoted economic growth, but has also greatly changed people's thinking, motivation and behavior. However, these changes also challenge the societal values in different ways, for example, individual concerns are greatly emphasized than ever. As Qi and Tang (2004) argue, private concerns now center around financial interests, material consumption and individual identity.

Although, the economy is growing in China, there is a huge gap in the regional economy between the eastern and the western areas, and between urban and rural areas. For example, in 2003 the average gross domestic product (GDP) per person in urban

Shanghai, was 46585.3 RMB<sup>2</sup> (equals CAN \$ 6,655.04), while the average GDP per person in the rural area of Guizhou province was only 3600 RMB (equals CAN \$514.3) (cited in Qi and Tang, 2004, p.468). Due to inequitable economic development, the people of China differ greatly in their living conditions, education and value orientations. For example, people in economically developed areas are well educated. According to China's Fifth Population Census report (CPIRC, 2000), 11.4% of the population in Shanghai has been to college; while only 1.9% of the population in Guizhou Province has been to college. Such differences have great influences on lifestyle, quality of life and people's values. People in economically developed areas have more modern, and are more open to Western views and values. They easily accept the ideas and values from the outside world, and pay more attention to personal interests. Personal interests are becoming more and more emphasized and are no longer sacrificed for collective interests, as in the past. Qi and Tang (2004) argue that individual rights, interests and values are now more and more recognized and respected; and at the same time, the values of competition, self-interest and personal financial gain are becoming gradually accepted.

The immature market economy has also brought about moral confusion, suspicion and money worship. Money plays a more important role in people's minds. Income and material consumption are becoming the conspicuous ways of showing people's identity, and thus are an important measure of a person's success (Qi & Tang, 2004).

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<sup>2</sup> The currency of the People's Republic of China.

Zhu (1997) argues that the value of materialism has led to a collapse of traditional beliefs and values, and deterioration in human relationships. These changes present serious challenges for young people and for moral educators.

### **Globalization, Mass Media and the Internet**

In the face of globalization, mass media and the Internet, China no longer blocks communication with other countries. People are increasingly open to cultural diversity. They not only care about what is happening in the world, but also like to present Chinese culture and achievements to the world and try to absorb what they see as good things from other cultures and lifestyles (Lu, 2003). The values and lifestyles of the Chinese people are greatly influenced by globalization and the vast body of information from mass media and the Internet. However, there is a large amount of available information that can create confusion among young people. People are curious and interested in new things, especially young people. The youth who have not yet developed mature values, views and the ability to make informed moral judgments, are likely to be heavily influenced—especially given that these changes are emerging very rapidly. In response to this situation, Qi and Tang (2004) worry that young people are too readily adopting a Western perspective on sex and violence, and offensive language. It is feared that young people will become moral nihilists.

In the global information age, there are many different ways for students to have contact with other cultures. But some of these contacts may have negative effects on

students' value orientations, and physical and mental health, making them admire foreign cultures at the expense of their own—especially as they indulge in the virtual world of the Internet. According to a recent report, children prefer to communicate with “machines” rather than read books; some children prefer to chat with people through Internet rather than talking with people directly (Huidi, 2001). Television and movies also influence young people in terms of their ideas of social roles, values and behavior. According to Qi and Tang (2004), the influence is largely negative. Too many commercials and media idols fill their minds, making teenagers lose their own value orientations, and their ability to think critically and independently. They see double standards in movies and TV programs, contradictory and often negative behavior modeled by adults (Krajewski & Bailey, 1999). This can make them feel confused about the values that society considers important, and these values that may be personally meaningful.

### **Emergent Issues**

The changes in people's ways of thinking and behaving have brought about different ideas and practices in moral education, and some of the ideas and practices are challenging the current state of moral education of China. However, the Ministry of Education of China has not met the challenges. It has not developed new curriculum guidelines to match the emergent moral changes. As I mentioned above, the latest version of the moral curriculum guidelines was issued in 2003. This is a long time

given how quickly China is changing. The growing affluence of Chinese people is especially remarkable. Luxury is affordable for most people living in the city. In 2006 alone, more than 7,000,000 cars were sold (Zhang, 2006). More profound changes have taken place in people's mindsets. New concepts such as market economy, transparency, win-win, are no longer just buzzwords. They have seeped into everyday thinking and become part of daily life.

More and more Chinese researchers (e.g., Lee & Ho, 2005; Qi & Tang, 2004) are becoming aware of the challenges arising from the social changes described above. Qi and Tang (2004) argue that the current moral education needs to be reformed in order to address the current situation. Similarly, Qi (1994) argues that the recent social changes have brought about a rebirth of school moral education in China, making the authoritarian and politicized moral education of the past no longer suitable. Qi notes that modern ideas on morality and moral education are gradually accepted by the Chinese people.

As early as 1993, Li Bin argued that one of the major moral conflicts emerging is the conflict between collectivism and individualism. Collectivism is one of the major core values in the planned economy period, and it is still represented in the current moral education curriculum. For Liou (1989, September 16), the goal of cultivating self-sacrifice has been replaced by the ideas "no money, no work" and "work according to the amount of money". People pay more attention to their own interests than to social and state interests. As I discussed above, pursuing self-benefit is becoming a

new value in the market economy. People show indifference to “others” or “other things” that are not economically related. “I don’t care” and “It’s none of my business” have become two popular phrases. A newspaper (Zhang 2007, March 14) recently told a story reflecting a phenomenon of apathy in China. In Chongqing City, a man fainted on the street and asked for help from the people who passed by, but no one stopped to help him until the police came. The whole incident lasted for more than twenty minutes! The story was not entirely “new” as reports of similar incidents are increasing.

Attitudes reflecting individual interests are also found in Yang’s research. A survey of more than 500 junior high school students in Ningxia City, Yang (2000) found that students did not learn much from the current moral education but were affected considerably by the changing society. For example, in the question “your attitude towards money”, 44.4% chose “money is my aim of life” and 6% chose “the more the better”; 35% students answered with “no idea”, “never think” about the future; 38.5% students would rather keep something found in the street, rather than send it to lost and found.

Another major concern about the current changing moral values is lack of respect for cultural heritage. For young people, traditional culture is “out”, as they are starting to admire the culture from developed countries, particularly their values and life styles. The popular saying “foreign moon is rounder than Chinese moon” refers to the idea that everything from developed countries is better than what we find in

China. Zhou (2006) states that if you ask children about their favorite food, most of them will say KFC or McDonald's; if you ask young adults about their favorite festival, most of them will say Christmas or Valentine's Day. Traditional culture is being abandoned. Fewer and fewer young people are clear about traditional culture, and less and less people realize that there is also a Chinese Valentine's Day. Spring Festival<sup>3</sup> is synonymous with boredom for most young people.

Whether these researchers are doing their research in a specific city or in a wider region, they find the same result: the current moral education curriculum is disconnected from the students, and students are affected more by the changing society than by their schools. Moral education curriculum needs to be reformed to address the current situation.

Some researchers (e.g., Qi, & Tang, 2004; Yang, 2000) give brief suggestions on the issue of implementing moral education reform, but most of them argue for changing the current curriculum policy of moral education in China. This, I believe, is not very realistic. The policy-making process is very complex in China, and it really takes a long time to issue a new one. We need to find some alternative ways to make it work for real, and not wait for changes in policy. Moreover, most of the research

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<sup>3</sup> The Spring Festival is traditionally the most important festival for the Chinese people. All family members get together, just like Christmas in the West. Everyone has seven days off for the holiday. In Spring Festival Eve, all family members eat dinner together. The meal is more luxurious than usual. New Year's day, everybody dresses up, and children extend greetings to their parents. Each child will get money as a New Year gift. The following days are a good time for relatives, friends, and classmates as well as colleagues to have parties together and to exchange greetings and gifts. And a series of activities will be held for days, such as burning fireworks, lion dancing, dragon lantern dancing, and temple fairs.

concentrates on describing the changing background and new challenges, but seldom focuses on addressing the problems in the current moral education curriculum, especially how to make the moral education curriculum reflect the social changes and the new needs of both the society and students.

In the next chapter, I discuss Chinese theoretical systems of morality and moral education, mainly Confucianism. I present the fundamental features of Confucian thoughts on morality and moral education. Through this exposition, I show the continuing relevance of Confucian thoughts to a reformed moral education in China. It would be a serious mistake, I believe, to completely abandon traditional perspectives. Societies cannot reinvent itself while totally ignoring its roots. Moreover, there is good or value in these traditional perspectives. It would be ironic for China to uncritically adapt Western values when these very values are increasingly criticized in the West (e.g., Postman, 1995; Schor, 2004).



## **Chapter Two: Confucianism and Moral Education**

When discussing the theoretical foundation of Chinese moral education, it is impossible not to mention traditional Chinese philosophies, like Buddhism, Confucianism and Taoism. As more and more Chinese people today are drawn to Western theories, interest in eastern theories, especially the Confucian tradition, is fading. This, I believe, is a mistake. No society can totally abandon its roots. The moral maturity of a community is determined, to a certain extent, by tradition. In this section, I will discuss the Confucian perspective in moral education, and argue for its continuing practical value for moral education in China.

Here it is necessary to highlight the importance of viewing Confucianism critically. For example, Confucianism is criticized by current scholars for its racism and gender biases. However, this does not mean that Confucianism should be rejected altogether. Some aspects of Confucianism still have practical value for modern society, especially the virtues, I will discuss later. I will begin by presenting an overview of Confucian philosophy.

### **Confucian Thinking about Morality: An Overview**

The reason I concentrate on Confucian philosophy, and not other Chinese traditional philosophies, is that Confucianism had a great influence on every aspect of

Chinese society. As Reed (1995) remarks, Confucian values have become a standard for shaping and directing the lives of generations of Chinese. Confucius (551—479BC) is considered the greatest educator and the most brilliant man in Chinese history. He is the first person to introduce the concept of education, to popularize education and to make teaching a profession in China (Kam, 1984, p.30). Although he has been dead more than twenty-five hundred years, his thoughts are still widely influential in almost every aspect of Chinese life, particularly in general education, moral education and politics.

Confucius' thoughts were developed by his students and later by Confucian scholars, referred to as Confucianists. The early representatives of the Confucianists are Confucius, Mencius and Xunzi. In the Han Dynasty (BC206—AD220), the Confucian master, Dong Zhongshu(179—104 BC), introduced Taoist philosophy, Yin-Yang, the Three Principles and the Five Constant Virtues<sup>4</sup> (Science Museums of China, 2007) in Confucianism. Dong Zhongshu's development of Confucius' thinking is considered as the booming period of Confucianism. Later in the Song Dynasty (960-1279), Confucianism was the main subject studied. A continuance of the study of the Confucian classics was the foundation of Chinese education during the Qing Dynasty (1644-1912) (Smith, 1991). Confucian morality formed part of the

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<sup>4</sup> Three Principles refers to three relationships: a citizen would respect his governmental leaders; a son would respect his parents; a wife would respect her husband. Five Constant Virtues are benevolence, righteousness, courteousness, wisdom and integrity. I will elaborate upon these later in the section.

syllabus at every educational stage over the centuries until the Cultural Revolution<sup>5</sup>, when Confucian thinking was completely abandoned by Mao Zedong (Cheng, 1951). However, Confucianism is still a prominent influence upon the minds of the Chinese people, and has, therefore, a close relationship with everyday life activities.

In Confucius' view, moral behavior is governed by relations and respect (Smith, 1991). Consequently, a son should respect his parents; a wife should respect and love her husband; and a citizen should respect his governmental leaders. These relations are summarized as the Three Principle relationships. It is the main content of ancient Confucian moral education. The Three Principles state that the emperor guides the subject, father guides the son and the husband guides the wife (Wang, 2004). The meaning of the "emperor guides the subject" is that both the mind and the body of a subject must belong to the emperor, and the same with the son in relationship with his father and the wife in relation to her husband (Wu, 1994). This idea of the three principal relationships clearly has its limitations. It is, for example, blatantly hierarchical and sexist. There is a common saying coming from the Three Principals, "if the emperor wants a subject to die, the subject has to die; if a father asks a son to die, the son has to die". This saying indicates that the Three Principals are only concerned with absolute authority and absolute obedience. The emperor, the father and the

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<sup>5</sup> Culture Revolution is a comprehensive reform movement in China initiated by Mao Zedong in 1965 to eliminate counterrevolutionary elements in the country's institutions and leadership. It was characterized by political zealotry, purges of intellectuals, and social and economic chaos. Confucianism's emphasis on tradition was attacked during the Culture Revolution. Mao Zedong encouraged children and students to denounce the traditional authority of elders and teachers as counterrevolutionary (Gutek, 2005).

husband are born with the power and right that the principal gave them, and the subject, the son and the wife have the obligation of unconditional obedience (Wang, 2004).

The Five Constant Virtues are also the main content of moral education in ancient Chinese society and they are still the most important virtues for contemporary context. This is the aspect of Confucianism that still has value for today. The Five Constant Virtues are benevolence, righteousness, courteousness, wisdom and integrity. Initially, these five virtues were attributed to Confucius and Mencius, and subsequently they were promoted as the Five Constant Virtues by Dong Zhongshu in the book, *The General Meaning of the Conference at Baihu*. In the chapter on character and feelings, Dong says:

The benevolent man is not hardhearted and he can love life and other people. The righteous man chooses to do things in a just and right way. The courteous man has good manners and, by being courteous, develops etiquette through long practice. The wise man knows clearly if he has some independent understanding of the ideas of the great thinkers; then he will never be puzzled about present matters, and he can find out main important things and can have deep insight through some trivial matters. The honest man is trustworthy and loyal and never betrays anyone. (Wu, 1994, p.381)

The Five Constant Virtues have had a very powerful, widespread and long-lived influence in China. The old government service was formed on the basis of those five virtues for over two thousand years. After the Han Dynasty, the content of the Five

Constant Virtues was greatly enriched and developed. It still has its continuing value and practical meaning for contemporary China, as I will discuss this later in the chapter.

Filial piety is another central principal thought of Confucian tradition.

According to Wikipedia (2007), “filial piety means to take care of one's parents, be obedient, show love, respect and support, display courtesy, ensure male heirs, uphold fraternity among brothers, wisely advise one's parents, conceal their mistakes (though some schools advocate pointing out and correcting their mistakes), display sorrow for their sickness and death, and carry out sacrifices after their death”. Even now, filial piety is still considered as the first virtue in Chinese culture. It is widely known that, as the saying goes, “among the various forms of virtuous conduct, filial piety comes first”. The concept of filial piety defines the ideal relationship between parents and children. It aims to create a strong tie from one generation to another. Some critiques, however, argue that filial piety is put in an extremely exalted position—“treated as something one might almost call an absolute, a metaphysical entity” (Holzman, 1998, p.185). Ho (1996) also believes that filial piety goes far beyond the requirement of just obeying and honoring one's parents. The following is a conversation between Confucius and his student from the Analects that supports Ho's and Holzman's critique:

The Duke of She told Confucius proudly (sic): “in my country there is a man so honest that when his father appropriated a sheep he bore witness to it.” “The honest men (sic) in my country,” replied Confucius, “are

different from that, for a father will screen his son, and a son his father,  
--and there is honesty in that.” (Confucius, n.d./1968, p.631)

“Stealing” is a universal negative action. However, according to the ethic of Confucianism—filial piety is the first priority. Confucius approves the fulfillment of filial piety instead of not stealing (Hwang, 1998).

The Mencius also records a story about the resolution of a similar dilemma:

Tao Ying asked, “When Shun was Emperor and Gao Tao was the judge, if Gu sou (Shun’s father) killed a man, what was to be done?”

“The only thing to do was to arrest (sic) him.”

“In that case, would Shun not try to stop it?”

“How could Shun stop it? Gao Tao had authorized (sic) for what he did.”

“Then what would Shun have done?”

“Shun looked upon giving up (sic) the Emperor as no more than discarding a worn shoe. He would have secretly carried the old man on his back and fled to the edge of the Sea and lived there happily, never giving a thought to be the Emperor (sic).” (Mencius, n.d./2003, p.303)

This solution might challenge universal moral judgment. As Fu (1973) questions, what if everyone else did the same as the Emperor? There would be no rules for making a fair and universal moral judgment.

Filial piety is also problematic in the way it restrains the ancient Chinese people to the institution of the family and of the society. Some may argue that filial piety establishes a good moral relationship within the family, especially between father and son (Chen & Zhu, 1998). However, such a morality usually depends on the strength

of an individual's private feelings and dispositions. Here morality is mainly a private morality, where one cares for oneself, friends and members of the immediate family. Such Confucian influences lead to a lack of public morality. Hence, it may be more difficult in contemporary life to find such moral concepts as social justice and love (as opposed to justice and love for one's own family and people who as part of one's "clan") (Wang, 2004).

### **Five Constant Virtues in Modern China**

The Five Constant Virtues have deep roots in China. Most Chinese people probably do not realize that their actions and thoughts are influenced by these five virtues. It is not an exaggeration to say that the Five Constant Virtues pervade all aspects of Chinese culture, both past and present.

#### **Benevolence**

Benevolence is the center of the Five Constant Virtues. The essential part of benevolence is love. This love is much more than just a general feeling of well-wishing towards others. In case of family, benevolence is rooted "in the love and respect that it is hoped one naturally feels towards one's parents and elder siblings, and in the kindness and tolerance one ideally feels toward one's younger siblings and other family members" (McCormick, 2004). Beyond the family, benevolence means generosity and kindness and taking full responsibilities, with respect and deference.

According to McCormick (2004), benevolent persons always try to put themselves in others' places so they can act as they would have others act towards them (cf. Johnson, 1993). Benevolent persons always try to do their best for others at all times. A benevolent person is someone who has overcome selfishness and inspires and instructs others through personal example.

Confucianists believe that all people have the capacity to be benevolent. They also believe that benevolent people will be "paid back". As Mencius (n.d./2003) says "the benevolent man loves others... He who loves others is always loved by them; he who respects others is always respected by them". If others do not respond to your love with love, Mencius believes it is because you did not do enough, you need to "look into your own benevolence" (p.174).

Benevolence is not an outdated virtue. In fact, the need for benevolence may be greater than ever. As I mentioned in chapter one, Chinese society is increasingly permeated by a wave of self-centeredness. Many are concerned that students only care for themselves, and are unwilling to help others, and unwilling to take responsibilities. Some students even pretend benevolence. They display "care" for others at school, but not in the family (Yang, 2007). So it is important to establish an atmosphere of benevolence that encourages mutual support and caring and creates a sense of community (cf. Noddings, 2002).

China is now moving towards a market economy and respect for personal interests is unprecedented. Respect for individual benefits, however, is not contradictory to



such moral values as finding pleasure in helping others and being kind to others (Lu & Gao, 2004). For this reason, I think the virtue, benevolence, must be fostered at the earliest possible age.

### **Righteousness**

The second Constant Virtue is righteousness, the virtue of knowing how to act appropriately in all circumstances. According to McCormick (2004), righteousness is “having the self-restraint to resist temptation and the fortitude to do one’s duty”. Here is a Confucian observation to illustrate its meaning. A student asked Confucius, “does a man of the superior class hold courage to be of highest importance (sic)?” Confucius answered, “the superior man holds righteousness to be of (sic) highest importance. A gentleman, who has courage but without righteousness, is likely to commit a crime. It is men of the lower order, with courage but without righteousness, who become robbers” (Confucius, n.d./1968, p.853).

Beneficial acts can be unjust; just acts might not be beneficial. But it is really hard to always resist temptation and completely be righteous in such a money-oriented society. Confucius gave us an example of how to become righteous. He said he would rather do a job that properly and relevantly earns a living, than cheat or steal to get money (Wei, 1990). Here Confucius urges one to go beyond one’s own immediate interests. This is a matter of doing the right thing for the right reason, something we need to learn from our hearts because it will guide us in our daily lives.

## **Courteousness**

Courteousness involves courtly manners, the proper way to perform ceremonies, such as funerals, weddings, and other occasions, and matters of etiquette in various social situations (McMormick, 2004). It sets standards but also imposes limitations because rules are greatly emphasized by Confucius. The limitation of this virtue is that many Chinese have characters of dependence, obedience and passivity because of being bound by rules. However, some rites, such as being polite, sincerely expressing oneself, truthfully communicating and establishing harmonious relationships with others, are still valuable for the current society. If we can sincerely express our feelings in regard to these rites, and make changes according to our needs, the virtue of courteousness still has its practical applications. These rites can help to govern social relationships and mutual duties, responsibilities, and expectations between people. In addition, courteousness is rooted in natural human feelings and mutually beneficial relationships, and the goal is harmony both within oneself and between people (McMormick, 2004). This goal can never be out of date.

## **Wisdom**

In ancient times, wisdom had two meanings: one means cleverness, and one means intellectual power. It has a close relationship with knowledge. It is easy to assume that with abundant knowledge comes great wisdom. But wisdom is not knowledge. That's why sometimes even smart people do stupid things. Knowledge

acquisition can go awry or being used poorly. In order to let wisdom make knowledge effective, Confucius (n.d.) gave us three methods to learn wisdom: “first, by reflection, which is the noblest; second, by imitation, which is the easiest; and third by experience, which is the most bitter”. We do not just gain wisdom from superficial reading, but we can begin to develop it from critical examination of our own life (by experience), from careful observation of the lives of others (by imitation), and from critical thinking of the knowledge we learned, and from purposeful meditation (by reflection). This is how we connect and employ knowledge that counts.

Mencius (n.d./2003) said that “the ability to distinguish the true and false is the beginning of wisdom” (p.72). So wisdom is primarily the virtue of discerning right from wrong. Knowing right from wrong involves self-reflection and critical thinking. Here people need to make their own judgments and choices based on their reflection. This is very important for Chinese students who are criticized for lack of critical thinking (I will return to this theme in the next chapter).

## **Integrity**

Integrity means not only being honest and trustful, but also being able to keep one’s word. A person of integrity is someone you can count on. Here is a classic tale<sup>6</sup> that shows us the importance of integrity:

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<sup>6</sup> This folktale is written from memory. Every child learns this folktale from his/her parents.

There was a naughty boy in the village. One day, the boy was watching his sheep. He was bored and wanted to make fun of the people. Then he got a good idea. He shouted, "Help! Wolf! Wolf! A wolf is coming!" The villagers ran to the boy, but there was no wolf. These people were angry with the boy. The second day, the boy was watching the sheep again. Then a big wolf really came to the boy and the sheep. The boy was scared and shouted, "Help! Help! A wolf is coming! A wolf is coming!" People heard the boy, but they did not believe the boy, so they did not come. At last, the big wolf ate the boy's sheep.

No one believed the boy because of the particular deception. He took advantage of people's generosity and created distrust. This, I believe, is the danger of living in a competition system that values personal gain above everything. How can a society have moral cohesion without integrity and trust!

Students' backpacks are full of textbooks and other materials and students race against time to attend different English and mathematics tutorial camps, but only few of them will be eligible for college enrollment. Cheating is no longer uncommon in schools, due to the need for students to pass hundreds of competitive examinations. Recently, China has suffered a series of scandals in schools: thousands of students in different areas were caught cheating in exams; teachers were caught selling exam contents (AP., 2006, June 3). Our society fosters competition to the point where there seems to be no need for learning trust in our schools. Instead of focusing on others as competitors to be defeated, we must focus on increasing trust among the

members of society. School can play a role in the practice.

In addition, to emphasize trust in moral education, not only means showing students the importance of trust in our lives, but also providing an atmosphere of trust. The school and teacher must be willing to trust the students and to supply a trusting atmosphere. They need to act with integrity to help students construct their own conception of integrity.

### **Practicing Virtues in Daily Life**

Confucianism believes that “virtue lies in practice”. The virtues grow in learning and practice. Confucianists see practice as essential to moral education. As Wang (2004) writes, whether one is a moral person is not determined by how much moral knowledge one has mastered, but by whether one can put it into practice (p.439). Practice enhances moral character.

Here the “practice” refers to small everyday actions. This practice does not mean doing some specific behaviors for some special purpose, but rather “behaving consistently and morally as a matter of course in daily life” (Wang, 2004, p.431).

According to Zhu Xi (1130-1200AD):

No matter whether a person speaks or not, and acts or not, everything is a potential opportunity for daily practice. Practicing moral behavior can be satisfactory when a person is vigilant, reflective and approaches practice with caution. It will not be satisfactory if a person practices moral behavior leisurely. (Li, 1994, p.222)

Zhu Xi himself gave us an example of learning virtues from practice. He said that only when he puts the good things into practice, these good things can become integrated with him and become his achievement (Wang, 2004, p.439).

Because of this emphasis on practice, Confucianists believe that “life is moral education”. *This is the quintessential idea in ancient Confucian thinking on moral education.* The Confucianists believe that life is the most important medium and the means for improving one’s moral character (Wang, 2004). The idea implies that moral education is life-long and should be the responsibility of the whole society, whole family and school. This demands that the moral curriculum can reflect the new issues in the changing emerging society. At this point, curriculum needs to draw from the real life events encountered by students. For example, there are some great figures and heroic exemplars from the past in the textbooks, but students do not learn much from these exemplary stories because such events are at a considerable distance from their own lives (Lu & Gao, 2004). We can replace the stories by real life events that can realistically reflect personal and social life.

In addition to “real life” events, other artful narration styles, such as poetry, novel, film, also provide opportunities for empathic learning regarding to value development. How might we integrate narration, mainly storytelling, with Chinese virtues and values? How might we get students actively involved in the program and transmit valuable traditional virtues at the same time? This is the topic for the next chapter.

## **Chapter Three: Western Approaches to Moral Education**

### **Introduction:**

To address changes in current Chinese moral education, some scholars have looked to find solutions from Western countries. A Western approach, some believe, might help students deal with new, emergent, and purportedly western values. Several Western approaches were introduced to China several years ago, especially Kohlberg's theory (1981, 1984) of moral development and the Values Clarification model. These two approaches are currently used in China. These two theories, I will argue, have important limitations and limited applicability for Chinese society.

This chapter focuses on past and present approaches to moral education in the Chinese context. The chapter is divided into three major sections. The first section focuses on Kohlberg's theory and Values Clarification. My aim here is to identify their limitations. I will then turn to storytelling as an alternative approach, and examine why this approach is appropriate for the Chinese context. In the end, I will discuss how to integrate storytelling with Chinese virtues and values, and how to transmit valuable traditional virtues while encouraging the students to be active and critical in the learning process.

## **Current Solutions for Chinese Moral Education**

### **Kohlberg's Theory**

It is beyond the scope of this theme to present a comprehensive elaboration of Kohlberg's theory. Instead, I focus on its core idea.

Kohlberg's basic theory (1981, 1984) is that moral judgment goes through a developmental sequence that involves definite stages. Kohlberg developed a six-stage model that presumes to capture the manner in which moral reasoning occurs (Courte, 1998). Kohlberg claims that children progressively develop to a higher stage of the six-stage sequence. Children may become fixated at various stages; however, they never go backwards. Kohlberg's aim is to encourage children to reach higher stages of moral thinking.

Kohlberg's six developmental stages of moral reasoning were presented as follows:

Stage 1: The punishment and obedience orientation.

Stage 2: The instrumental relativist orientation.

Stage 3: The interpersonal concordance of "good boy-nice girl" orientation.

Stage 4: The law and order orientation.

Stage 5: The social-contract legalistic orientation generally with utilitarian overtones.

Stage 6: The universal ethical principle orientation. (Galbraith & Jones, 1976, p.10-13)



Kohlberg's approach to moral education relies on the use of moral dilemmas. Activities are designed to involve students making hypothetical moral decisions through the discussion of moral dilemmas. According to MEQ (1987), "a moral dilemma presents a situation in which the central character has to decide between alternative possibilities for action on a moral issue" (p.19). Kohlberg's theory aims to introduce the moral dilemma as a teaching strategy, as a way of developing students' levels of moral reasoning.

Kohlberg's theory first became famous in North America, and then played a very important role in moral education all over the world. Like every popular theory, Kohlberg's theory was also heavily researched and criticized. Carol Gilligan (1977, 1980, 1988a, 1988b) may be the one who gave the most important critique of Kohlberg. Gilligan criticized the theory for its gender bias. Women were not even included in the research samples, and were usually classified lower than men, particularly at stage three in stages of cognitive moral development. According to Gilligan (1977), women see morality through relationality, care and love. None of these realities, however, are considered as moral maturity in Kohlberg's theory. Other critics in cross-cultural contexts criticize the theory for seeing the values of male, white, and American intellectuals as the end point of moral maturation. Shewder (1982) points out that the theory was formulated from the perspective of the Western ideology of rationalism, individualism, and liberalism. Although Kohlberg's claim of cultural universality has been examined in non-Western societies (e.g., Hong Kong, Taiwan) (Snarey, 1985), it

has never been examined in mainland China. Moreover, the moral reasoning data are never collected in collectivist or socialistic societies. The imposition of Kohlberg's system on the moral reasoning of Chinese students may ignore moral judgments prevailing in Chinese traditional contexts, and fail to appreciate their substantial underlying ethical philosophies (Vine, 1986; Hwang, 1998).

### **Values Clarification**

Another Western approach which is currently used in China is Values Clarification. Value Clarification made a significant contribution in the West by emphasizing the importance of an individual's thinking and the right to be different (Kirchenbaum, 1992). Its proponents argue that values are personal and subjective, that teachers ought to remain value-neutral, teach children to explore and develop their own values, and learn to analyze values. According to Raths and his colleagues (1966), this approach is based on two assumptions: (1) that it is wrong to impose values in a pluralistic society, and (2) that children will care more about values that they assessed and determined on their own than values that are dictated by adults (cited in Courte, 1998, p. 20). In this approach, teachers are expected to put aside their own values and lead non-judgmental discussions. For example, if a student "values" violence, according to this approach, it is not appropriate for the teacher to give an alternatives judgment to settle the issue, but to be a facilitator to clarify values already present in the students and encourage students' critical thinking (Courte, 1998).

Values Clarification has also come under considerable attack (e.g., Kelly, 1988; Knapp, 1981; Emberley, 1995). Value Clarification is criticized for its individualistic-orientation to values. Value Clarification puts great emphasis on clarifying values to make free choices based on personal feelings and beliefs. This emphasis leads to the view that “everybody has a right to his own opinion” (Tappan & Brown, 1989, p.198). It provides little appreciation for the making of choices that would be applicable to the larger social context. Some critics argue that Values Clarification is pedagogically destructive, in that it promotes ethical relativism (Morris, 1994, p.24). Value Clarification tends to avoid dealing with value conflicts altogether (Morris, 1985). Moreover, Values Clarification does not make allowances for the possibility that children may make errors in matters of values (Halstead, 1996). Value Clarification tends to be heavily subjectivistic and privatistic. As Parker Palmer (1983) writes, “if private knowledge is the measure of all things, I can never be drawn into an encounter with realities outside myself” (p.55). This privatism is particularly problematic for those Chinese students who are used to learning by remembering and who have never been taught to think critically.

### **The Storytelling Approach: An Alternative Solution**

Unlike Kohlberg’s theory or Values Clarification, a storytelling approach combines the favorable aspects of the “traditional” approaches while avoiding many of their weaknesses. A storytelling approach to moral education balances feeling,

thought, and interaction between teachers and students through its use of story (Korman, 1995). In the following section, I will discuss the importance of storytelling and how it works in moral education, especially its saliency for the Chinese context.

Narrative, according to Gudmundsdottir (1995), refers to “the structure, knowledge, and skill required to construct a story” (p.24). From Gudmundsdottir’s definition of narrative, we can see the close relationship between narrative and storytelling. He states that, in everyday life, narrative and storytelling refer to the same thing: “accounts of action usually involving humans or humanized animals. A story has characters; a beginning, a middle and an end; and is held together by a series of organized events, called plots” (cited in Pousao-Lopes, 1997, p. 43). While, professional literature about the word “narrative” is used as a more encompassing term, it has a larger context of conversation, instruction and practice. A more useful definition of narrative to explain its relationship to storytelling is proposed by Hernstein-Smith (1981). She sees narrative as “a series of verbal, symbolic, or behavioral acts sequenced for the purpose of ‘telling someone else that something happened’” (cited in Pousao-Lopes, 1997, p.44). In this instance, narrative could be represented as two aspects: one is story, which includes characters, events, settings; the other is the expressing of the story, which could be very broad, for example, written, oral theatrical performance or even dance.

Although “narrative” is more frequently used than “storytelling” in the literature because of its broader meaning, “storytelling” is much more welcomed by teachers in

classroom practice. For teachers, storytelling emphasizes face-to-face shared oral stories. The main challenge is to identify how and where to use storytelling to teach as well as reasons for choosing it as a teaching method (Kuyvenhoven, 2005).

According to Morris (2000), there is a growing body of literature on the importance of storytelling in moral education. Many educators recognize storytelling's power in teaching values to children. For example, William Kilpatrick (1992), Carol Witherell (1995), Mark Tappan and Lyn Mikel Brown (1989) all are major proponents of storytelling in moral education.

For some people, storytelling is merely a form of entertainment, a technique to keep students attentive. But Morris (1994) thinks that storytelling is more than entertainment; it can help us to make sense of our experience. He argues that "we do not tell stories simply because they are more entertaining than arguments or ideas, but because they offer opportunities for self-understanding" (p.77). In reviewing literature on storytelling (e.g., Tracy, 1986; Blakely, 1988), Morris (1997) points out that "stories have the power to fully articulate, order and unify the richness and complexity of our actual lived experience" (p.77). Similarly, as Stanley Hauerwas writes:

A story, thus, is a narrative account that binds events and agents together in an intelligible pattern. We do not tell stories simply because they provide us a more colorful way to say what can be said in a different way, but because there is no other way we can articulate the richness of intentional activity—that is, behavior that is purposeful but not necessary.

For any good novelist knows that there is always more involved in any human action than can be said. To tell a story often involves our attempt to make intelligible the muddle of things we have done in order to have a self. (cited in Morris, 1994, p.77)

A story is a representation of elements of the world, an illustration of ways of conducting oneself. Livo and Rietz (1986) explain that “‘story’ is a universal mirror that shows us ‘truths’ about ourselves—who and why we are. When we look into this mirror, we see daily routine and mundane circumstances transformed into something profound. ‘Story’ takes the ordinary and binds it into all of human existence, revealing the significance of the trivial” (p.4). Witherell and Noddings (1991) also claim that narrative structure contributes to our understanding of the meaningfulness of everyday life. Rives Collins and Pamela Cooper (1997) give three reasons to explain why storytelling is a powerful teaching tool: (1) storytelling allows the teacher to provide instruction indirectly; (2) storytelling prompts questions and conversations; (3) learning becomes fun when stories are used. In short, the story’s content holds certain moral advice and thus “carries the values of society” (cited in May, 1991).

Story has a tight relationship with moral education. It is difficult to separate stories from morality. For Freeman (1991), even the way in which a story is told, “implies a moral stance: one has made a narrative choice, to tell this sort of story rather than that, and this choice often issues from the most fundamental beliefs, values, and ideals that one holds” (p.98). Tappan (1991) also claims that offering events with

moral meaning is one of the fundamental functions of the narrative. It is impossible to narrate without moralizing at the same time.

Stories can serve as models of moral behavior and make abstract morality more concrete and palpable. This is particularly important in the domain of morality—where reality is often highly complex and “messy”. Stories provide a multitude of examples of right and wrong *in specific contexts*. This creates a frame of reference to think about what is morally appropriate in a given context. Stories also create opportunities for students’ experience of enter into and identify with the characters. This connection to real life is more powerful and effective than just telling students the rules. Robinson and Hawpe (1986) write “...where practical choice and action are concerned, stories are better guides than rules or maxims. Rules and maxims state significant generalizations about experience but stories illustrate and explain what those summaries mean” (p.124) (cf. Johnson, 1993).

Morris (2000) suggests that narration can be taught from two perspectives: personal narration and the use of stories from the wider culture(s), for example, from novels, plays, poems, biographies or movies. In the following part, I will examine the storytelling approach in terms of these two aspects—(1) personal narration, and (2) stories beyond the self.

Personal narration helps to develop personal identities. It helps us to make sense of our lives. It also serves as a way to integrate our experience, memories and hopes to “make sense of our past, plan our future, and comprehend the lives of others”

(Narayan, 1991, p.114). As Polkinghorne (1988), writes “we achieve our personal identities and self-concept by seeing our life as an expression of a single unfolding and developing story” (p.150). We all live in a story. Tappan and Brown (1989) also emphasize on encouraging students tell their own moral stories. They focus on authorship and self-authorization as the goals of moral development. Here moral decisions are closely linked to our personal history. Drawing from Tappan and Brown, Morris (2000) argues that personal narration helps learners think through the moral questions and conflicts of their own lives. When an individual tells a moral story about one’s personal experience, he or she has the chance to reflect on that experience. Through reflection, an individual may learn from the events by being aware of his or her feelings, thoughts and actions.

For Morris (2000), however, personal narration is insufficient by itself. Our personal stories need to be connected to some broader stories. These are “stories beyond self”. As Postman writes:

Human beings require stories to give meaning to the facts of their existence... I am talking about the more profound stories that people, nations, religions, and disciplines unfold in order to make sense out of the world... If our stories are coherent and plausible and have continuity, they will help us to understand why we are here, and what we need to pay attention to and what we may ignore. A story provides a structure for our perceptions; only through stories do facts assume any meaning whatsoever. (cited in Courte, 1998, p. 72)



Here our personal and cultural stories give meaning and support to individual existence. This is also coherent with Coles' (1990) observation that children not only understand their own lives in a narrative way, but their personal narrations are profoundly influenced by the stories they have known (cited in Korman, 1995, p.36). Personal stories are well served by the storied voices of others. Those stories are not just the stories from friends', relatives' or teachers'. They could be drawn from the larger culture, for example, fictional stories such as folktales, dramas, novels, legends. As Johnson (1993) claims, literature can help us think about how we affect each other and how we compose our relationships.

Moreover, storytelling engages the imagination in learning. Stories provide the opportunity to build imaginative activities, which helps individuals imagine a world of possibilities. As Courte (1998) states "an enriched imaginative capacity is more generative and more flexible. This allows us to think of a greater range of things as possibly being so; our possibilities being more innovative, effective and rich" (p. 60). This is why Kohl (1995) argues that "imagination gives rise to the idea of possibility" (p.62). By engaging the imagination, stories create a vision of a moral person and a more moral world in specific contexts and believable situations.

It is also necessary to mention that storytelling makes learning enjoyable. With storytelling, morality is no longer just a matter of rule keeping, but of role-playing (Korman, 1995). Kilpatrick (1992) suggests that the surest foundation for morality is the belief that we have a role to play in life. Storytelling gets teachers and learners

involved in the story together. A storytelling-teacher, according to Sawyer, is “able to create a story, to make it live during the moment of the telling, to arouse emotions—wonder, laughter, joy, amazement” (cited in Kuyvenhoven, 2005, p. 25). It has children interested engaged and curious.

In China, narration is often rejected by teachers as inappropriate. They see storytelling as an entertainment, not as a formal teaching method. Teachers are rarely aware that the development of moral reasoning is a process. As the above suggest, students may learn through reflections on the story by relating the story to their own experience. Unfortunately, many teachers of moral education do not take advantage of the capabilities of imagination. Instead, they treat the story as just another source of information. “What can we learn from this story?” becomes a teacher’s favorite question. This didactic approach turns the class into a routine, starting with the explanation of the story, sentence by sentence, paragraph by paragraph, and then goes directly to the “moral of the story”. This routine focuses on rules, preaching the truth, and remembering the rules versus personal reflection through imaginative engagement with the material.

A sound moral education must link with rich content of the culture. Culture, as Howard defines, is “a community of individuals who share the same essential world views and interpretations” (cited in Korman, 1995, p.51). Stories are a great way to present the culture of a community and to transmit moral values generation by generation. Schank(1990), points out that “knowing a culture means knowing the

stories that the culture provides” (p.149). Every country has its own values represented in stories. These stories often include the basic values of the nation. They embody the culture. Storytelling is one way to honor traditional values while at the same time opening up new avenues for reflection. As Tappan (1991) writes “each and every culture has a particular set of narratives and stories that are passed down from generation to generation, and this set provides narrative structures that both enable and constrain the thoughts, feelings, and actions of everyday experience” (p.10). Packer (1991) also claims that people act on the possibilities afforded them by their cultural circumstances and traditions, and at the same time transform them. In this sense, our personal stories are some version of general stories of own culture. China used to have rich resources of stories. However, the beauty of the stories is no longer appreciated. People normally don’t consider storytelling as a formal teaching approach. The heritage of traditional stories has almost been taken over by the entertainment industry. Stories have been lost to TV shows and advertisements.

I think the most compelling point of storytelling for Chinese moral education is that it gives *authority* to students. Storytelling leaves plenty of room for individuals to identify, project, and interpret in their own ways, that is, if teachers give them the space to do so. Through narration, learners are actively engaged in the learning process on many levels, allowing for the development of a greater reliance on his/her personal authority (Korman, 1995). This is especially important for Chinese moral education. As I have noted in Chapter One, Chinese students have typically been indoctrinated

into a fixed set of values, virtues, and rules of conduct. The Chinese moral education program has ensured that all students learn a common set of Chinese virtues and values, such as kindness, respect for the law, knowing right from wrong, self-discipline, and love of country. However, without encouraging students to learn things from their own moral experience; to discuss, to examine, to reflect critically on values and ethical positions, these virtues and values mean nothing to them. Students only learn obedience and conformity.

## **Stories We Tell**

Stories offer myriad opportunities for children to learn. A good story has the power to invite readers' own emotions in the character's feelings and actions, and to inspire readers to think about their own actions and choices. For young readers who are eager to search for creative and resourceful solutions to their questions and confusions from their favorite characters, these characters' solutions often shine a small light that suggests certain paths are good, trusted, and certain paths lead to depth, imagination and compassion. In addition, stories not only provide truths, they promote an appreciation of one's own cultural values at the same time. Therefore, in this section, I will elaborate on values that are abundant in stories from history and culture—historical stories, fairy tales and folktales.

## **Historical Stories**

Historical stories provide a rich resource to discuss values, especially in the context of social studies. Wineburg (1999) once wrote: “Coming to know others, whether they live on the other side of the tracks or the other side of the millennium, requires the education of our sensibilities. This is what history, when taught well, gives us practice in doing” (p.488). Historical stories are often children’s first introduction to the study of history and culture heritage.

Cultural heroes, role models and moral exemplars are one means to encourage the continuity of Chinese culture (Reed, 1995). They transmit the most cherished values and ideas of the Chinese culture. For example, the story Yue Fei encouraged two important virtues—filial piety and patriotism:

Yue Fei lived during the Song Dynasty when China was attacked from the south by the Jin tribe. The emperor was kidnapped. Yue Fei wished to join the army and fight to protect the country. But his mother was very old and he felt that it was his filial duty to stay with her. His mother, however, was realizing that he was remaining at home for her. She urged him to go. “If the country falls, where will the family be?” she asked him. “When one must choose between the virtues of loyalty to the country and filial piety,” She instructed Yue Fei, “one must decide which is the more essential, which the less. Go quickly and defend the country!” Yue Fei went and fought bravely, and the Jin soldiers were defeated. (Martin, 1975, p.245)

This story creates opportunities for young readers to come to know the historical

character—Yue Fei, as they read and identify with the character from his times and place. It also presents a way to deal with the relationship between filial piety and patriotism: “while duty to family remains the primary concern, the story stresses that the sanctity of the family relies on the strength and unity of the nation” (Martin, 1975, p.245). Along with the story, children get the chance not just to look at the world through different eyes, but to look at different worlds. They can better understand what values are, and how they transmit or vary throughout culture and times. Meanwhile, children can begin to identify and understand their own personal, family, and community values.

### **Fairy Tales and Folktales**

Fairy tales and folktales also have a place in helping students explore values. Most stories deal with the struggles between good and evil; and each demonstrates values that emerge from that struggle. Cleverness, loyalty, frugality, generosity, bravery, love and patience are popular values represented in these tales. Most of the fairy tales and folktales involve some sort of imaginary creature through characters of heroes and heroines. Heroes and heroines often embody values that cultures hold highly. They also reflect aspects of particular cultural conditions (Campbell, 1968). Through their appearance, dress, their personalities, actions, adventures and trials, heroes and heroines offer a framework to think about what is morally salient.

The legend of Mulan is a story of heroic behavior, and a special example of women characters who take the non-traditional role of warrior. The story of Mulan portrays the Chinese heroine General Hua Mulan who disguised herself as a man to serve in the imperial army in place of her father. This character that defies traditional role models had been a source of inspiration for young girls. In the book *The Warrior Woman: Memoirs of a Girlhood among Ghosts*, Maxine Hong Kingston narrates the powerful memories that show how the story of Hua Mulan has symbolized the power of warrior women:

At last I saw that I too had been in the presence of great power, my mother talking-story. After I grew up, I heard the chant of Hua Mulan (sic), the girl who took her father's place in battle. Instantly, I remembered that as a child I had followed my mother about the house, the two of us singing about how Hua Mulan (sic) fought gloriously and returned alive from war to settle in the village. I had forgotten this chant that was once mine, giving me by my mother, who may not have known its power to remind. She said I would grow up to be a wife and a slave, but she taught me the song of the warrior woman, Hua Mulan. I would have to grow up a warrior woman. (Kingston, 1977, p.20)

Apart from the inspiration of heroes and heroines, fairy tales and folktales also convey lessons about moral decisions. Bettelheim (1989) describes how supporting characters, motifs, symbols, conflicts and magic in fairy tales help children find meaning in life, develop psychologically, and learn about authority, identity, emotions, reality and morality. Of utmost importance to Bettelheim is that fantasies help

children find their “own solutions through what the story seems to imply about themselves and ...their inner conflicts” (p. 25). Bettelheim’s emphasis on decision making, personal development, and social learning highlights critical thinking in values education.

Another trait of fairy tales and folktales is the presence of magic. Magic represents opportunities, imagination, love, kindness, triumph of good over evil, and hope. Magic is a key element to engage readers in the heroes’ and heroines’ journey, to discover heroic characters’ new insights, values, and powers, as well as their own.

The story of the Monkey King is also an authentic magic story. Many Chinese children grow up with this story. Monkey King—Sun Wukong is another famous hero in Chinese culture. He knew 72 forms of magic. He could transform himself into 9,000 things, ride clouds, and turn somersaults of 18,000 miles each. He is the protagonist of *Journey to the West*. His journey to the Western Heavens represents substantive challenges: always getting into trouble in the most unexpected places, fighting through not only outright confrontation and abduction but also lies and disguises (Journey to the West, 2006). Like other magical tales, the story of Monkey King also conveys many positive values: courage, persistence, integrity, caring and appreciation of others, pursuit of justice, and moral choice. In our daily lives, when we hold or inspire to these values, we all become heroes and heroines.

Other than historical stories and fairy and folk tales, there are substantive stories in other forms that nourish the emergence of authorship, such as in poetry, fiction, and



film. These stories leave plenty of room for individuals to get involved in their own ways. Once in my class, I talked about a story from the textbook about Kong Rong and his courtesy as a child: when the family eats pears together, he always picks the smallest pear. When asked why not take the bigger ones, the boy of four answered: "I am the youngest, it is only right that I take the smallest pear. I should let my elder brothers and sisters enjoy the bigger ones." As soon as I finished the story, there was a student said "I like the big one, it is sweet." I did not comment and told another story about myself instead. I told them the story that when I was young, I used to think that my mom really loved eating fish heads. I was too young and too selfish to realize that she was saving the best parts for me. A student responded to me "Yes! Yes! My mom said the same thing to me; she always eats the chicken bones. Now I know why." Another student was proud to tell me that he was better than Kong Rong because he could take care of his mother when she was sick. A week later, a mother came to pick up her daughter, and told me after her daughter learned the story of Kong Rong, she never fights with her sister for comic books again. As the girl said "I should be better than Kong Rong because I am older than him".

These personal stories bring the character Kong Rong, who was from hundreds years ago, into students' lives. It creates a space for students to have voices of their own. It stimulates connection and reflection. This is what good stories do. When the student was talking about how he understood his mother's love, and when another

student was expressing his care for his mother, these stories were encouraging an emerging self-consciousness and identity. Through these stories, students have the chance to reflect on their experiences, at the same time, they become “real life” role models. I like to think the last girl’s action was at least partially affected by her classmates. The connection with her counterparts’ personal narrations creates an opportunity for her to identify, to project and to interpret. Through this learning process, learners are engaged in self-reflection and are authoring their own personal values. *Here traditional culture and personal values meet in a live encounter.*

## **Conclusion**

In the process of modernization the outcomes for Chinese society may not always be positive and moral education as currently taught has its limitation in addressing the emerging social changes. As Qi and Tang (2004) argue, “many complicated issues need to be dealt with; otherwise, if these issues are not well addressed, it will be hard to evaluate whether or not China will have been successful in its transition to a mature and developed society” (p.478).

In this thesis I have attempted to redesign the moral education curriculum in a meaningful and practical manner to enrich students’ moral lives, and to provide an antidote to the current confusion regarding values in China. This research began with an overview of the current compulsory Chinese moral education curriculum. I suggested that moral education in Chinese has failed to meet the interests and needs of young people. Students are affected more by the changing society than by their schools. The moral education program needs to find an alternative way to exert perceptible influence on youth. Chapter two proposed that Confucianism still has meaningful and practical value in the modern China. Here the Five Constant Virtues could become important spiritual sources because these virtues have the potential to inspire us to deal with moral conflicts in the emerging society. Chapter three investigated the relevant literature derived from western theories and strategies,

especially the storytelling approach. I see storytelling as a way of develop self-reflection and self-consciousness. The examination of Confucianism and storytelling shows that we can learn from the West without negating or abandoning our own tradition. Moral education will be more effective by teaching the contents of the Five Constant Virtues, especially if this content is taught along with the contemporary narrative approach. Here narrative emphasizes both cultural traditions and personal growth and agency.

The study of moral values in the classroom will help our students function more effectively and coherently in their communities, nation, and the global world. In addition to storytelling's efficacy to convey academic knowledge to all age levels, "let me tell you a story" is an excellent introduction to, and opportunity for, students to engage in moral reflection and dialogue. Stories do not just grab our attention in an entertaining way. They also give us opportunities to develop our own voices. Here learners are given the authority to meaningfully engage in vital moral themes like compassion, human decency, caring, sharing, respect, responsibility, and cultural heritage. Narrative is a way to nourish, encourage, and sustain ourselves (Howe, 1984).

Moreover, themes such as benevolence, righteousness, courteousness, wisdom and integrity are embedded in historical stories and fairy and folk tales as well as other artful stories. These stories honor traditional values and also open up new paths for reflection. Through stories, children can discover Chinese culture, learn about the

moral power of stories, and experience themselves as moral thinkers. Through cultural literacy events that incorporate personal voices and authority, children learn through self-reflection. Sharing of different personal stories and cultural stories also encourages cooperative learning. Students will witness firsthand what it means to care and share, and to be respectful and responsible.

Just as I was about to put the finishing touches on this thesis, I was shocked to see a video showing a Beijing teacher being insulted. Since the short video was posted on Youtube, it has been viewed 700,000 times, and received thousands of comments in both English and Chinese. The five-minute clip showed an elderly male teacher being insulted by a group of students: one student approaches the teacher and pulls off his hat while the other twenty or so students cheer. Later another boy throws a plastic bottle at the teacher while other students burst out laughing. The clip is riddled with abusive language. When I viewed the video, I was shocked and speechless. In a country where Confucian attitudes to education and authority are supposed to be the norm, I really feel sorry for the teacher and the students. I do not want to blame them. Rather, I feel even more convinced of the need to develop a cogent moral education program. Students need to think through moral issues in ways that are at once personally meaningful and respectful of tradition. It is no longer tenable to merely inculcate a set of values.

The moral education of youth should contribute to children's understanding of the world while sensitizing them to the necessity of making wise choices that benefit

themselves and society. Moral education in China needs to address the complex challenges of the present millennium.

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